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La recherche sur l'acquisition d'une langue seconde se préoccupe
beaucoup de déterminer si l'étudiant en classe suit le même mode
d'apprentissage et les mêmes étapes que celui qui apprend cette langue
de façon naturelle. Certains chercheurs considèrent que l'apprentissage
d'une langue seconde en classe se limite à l'aspect formel de la langue
et ne s'accompagne pas d'une véritable acquisition. Cependant, la
recherche qui fait l'objet de cette communication porte précisément sur
l'acquisition en classe de l'anglais, langue seconde, acquisition
désignant ici des processus inconscients de structuration,
d'organisation et d'essais, semblables à ceux qui sont reconnus chez les
enfants qui acquièrent leur langue maternelle.

La recherche a porté sur des élèves francophones des environs de
Montréal, qui fréquentaient des classes de la sixième à la onzième année
(11 à 17 ans), qui vivaient en milieu francophone et avaient reçu des
cours d'anglais en quatrième ou cinquième année. On a utilisé comme
matériel, des enregistrements sonores de cours d'anglais, des entrevues
et un jeu de cartes contenant des illustrations que l'élève devait
décrire; l'étude a aussi tenu compte d'autres travaux scolaires
accomplis par les élèves.

Les résultats de cette étude révèlent une absence déconcertante de
progrès dans l'usage des morphèmes grammaticaux par des jeunes
francophones soumis au programme officiel d'anglais langue seconde,
alors que les élèves qui apprennent l'anglais de façon naturelle
acquièrent cette habileté de façon progressive. La recherche démontre
que l'enseignement par courtes périodes de l'anglais à des groupes
d'adolescents qui ne le parlent pas en dehors de l'école, en pratiquant
sans cesse les mêmes règles de grammaire, ne conduit pas à
l'amélioration attendue des aspects de la langue favorisée par le
programme. Pire, les intérêts et les habiletés de l'élève sont souvent
négligés ou niés.

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Acquiring english L2 in Quebec
classroom.

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Acquiring English L₂ in Quebec Classrooms

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A major question for L₂ acquisition research is the extent to which learners in classroom settings follow developmental patterns and stages similar to those observed in "natural" L₂ acquisition. As researchers, we need to answer the teacher's sceptical question: Don't learners in a formal classroom setting approach language development in a way different from the approach taken by those in a natural or informal setting?

Krashen (1976, 1981) has defined two ways in which knowledge of a second language may be internalized: language learning and language acquisition. Learning refers to the internalization of rules and other knowledge of the language through conscious processes, with the learner's attention focused on the form of the language. Acquisition refers to the internalization of rules of the language through unconscious processes, while attention is focused on meaning. Language acquisition is thought to entail "a fairly stable order of acquisition of structures" (1981, p.1) in the sense that certain linguistic elements appear to be difficult and others relatively easy for

learners regardless of their L₁ and regardless of factors such as aptitude and motivation. To what extent are these acquisition orders affected by instruction? Are they powerful enough to override an instructional sequence or does formal instruction lead to different developmental orders?

Most language acquisition research has been carried out with subjects who received no instruction or who had opportunities for both informal and instructional exposure to the language. Until recently there has been relatively little interest in examining the language of classroom learners for evidence of language acquisition. Some researchers and teachers doubt that acquisition can be an important factor in the development of second languages in the classroom. They suggest that classroom learners, because of the circumstances in which they find themselves, are essentially learning rather than acquiring a second language. They question whether acquisition can be said to exist in classrooms where input to the learners is rigidly controlled according to a form-based syllabus and where communicative use of the target language is virtually absent, especially in the early stages.

Krashen (1981) has suggested that acquisition can take place in classrooms because classrooms provide learners "with samples of the target language which are comprehensible and appropriate to the learners' level of knowledge of the language. Felix (1981) has reported on research showing that at least some of the errors made by German adolescents exposed to English in formal second language classrooms appeared to conform to so-called universals in language development rather than to the patterns of instruction.

Once the terms "acquisition" and "learning" have been introduced, it becomes difficult to find a neutral term for the overall phenomenon of becoming a speaker of another language. For this reason, I find it necessary to clarify my use of various terms. Acquisition and learning will be used in the sense proposed by Krashen. The term language development will be used to refer to acquisition and/or learning, that is, it will serve as the neutral term. I have sought unsuccessfully a neutral term for the individual whose second language development is being studied and have finally concluded that the best term is learner. Thus the term learner is not used here to imply a particular type of language development (i.e. formal, conscious) but is meant to be neutral.

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it is difficult to find appropriate means for eliciting "spontaneous" language data from them. Persons who have no experience with informal use of language are not good conversational partners. And yet, most researchers agree that a study of "language learner language" is not complete without a sample of speech the learner uses when his attention is focussed on the content rather than on the form of his utterance (Krashen, 1976; Tarone, 1979).

While the difficulties of classroom-based language acquisition research are many, there are also advantages. One can readily contact large numbers of subjects who share some set of defined characteristics such as age and native language. It is easier to control for the length and amount of exposure to the target language than in "natural" acquisition environments. Perhaps the greatest advantage is that it is possible to describe with considerable accuracy the target language input available to the learners. This makes possible reliable descriptions of the relationship(s) between input and the learners' language. Such descriptions are the raw material for inferences about the processes of language development. Discovering the relationships between classroom input and learners' language is not simple, but a number of researchers have begun to work in this direction. (See Haidyan, 1978; Plann, 1977, for research in immersion settings; Larsen-Freeman, 1976; Lightbown, in press; Long and Sato, in press, for learners in more traditional L₂ classrooms.)

Procedures

The research reported in this paper is based on a study of the development of English by classroom-instructed learners.* Cross-sectional and longitudinal designs were combined in order to permit the investigation of the development of English by students from grade 6 to grade 11 (ages 11 - 17). These students speak only French at home, live in majority-French areas near Montreal, and receive English L₂ instruction beginning in grade 6 or 5. In elementary school (grades 4, 5, 6), the subjects of this study had a maximum of two hours of English per week. In secondary

*Partial reports on this research have appeared in Lightbown, in press; Lightbown and Spada, 1978; Lightbown, Spada, Wallace, 1980; Lightbown and Holcolm, 1980.

The research to be reported in this paper provides further evidence that second language acquisition (defined as the unconscious structuring, organizing, hypothesis-testing processes similar to those attributed to children in native language development), does take place in classroom settings, even when the focus of the classroom interaction appears to be on form, rather than meaning. While there are observable differences between the development of L₁ or L₂ in "natural" settings as opposed to L₂ in classroom settings, they may be due as much to differences in the input (that is, to the characteristics of the available target language) as to differences in the way in which learners process the input. The input in natural acquisition settings is likely to be rich and varied, containing both simplified speech addressed to the learner and the more complex speech among native speakers around him. Input to classroom learners on the other hand, tends to be very restricted and distorted in that it is usually based on teaching points to be emphasized and on concerns for proceeding from the "simple" to the "complex" where simplicity is defined in terms of linguistic descriptions.

Classroom Research on L₂ Acquisition

There are many problems associated with carrying out L₂ acquisition research in classrooms. In most elementary and secondary school language classes, learners give few individual responses. It is therefore difficult to obtain enough data from an individual learner to make any analysis reliable. Furthermore, student responses are frequently so tightly controlled by the teacher that there is little opportunity for students to "take risks" attempting to stretch their use of the language to its limits and thereby revealing, by their errors, whatever false hypotheses or overgeneralized rules they may be operating on. Even when errors are made, they often appear to be random or based on some quirk of the immediate environment - including the student's perception of the exercise, drill, or other pedagogical activity. Since the errors of one student are infrequent, one can not be sure which errors are random or induced by the situation and which may be reflections of some interlanguage system.

Thus, research on classroom learning usually requires that additional data be obtained from the learners outside the classroom. This leads to further difficulties, however. When learners are true "classroom learners", that is, having little exposure to the L₂ outside the classroom setting,

school (grades 7, 8, 9, 10, 11), they had approximately 14 hours a week. Most students reported that they had no contact with English speakers outside school. However, many watched at least one or two English television programs. The instructional materials were of the audio-lingual type (Look, Listen, and Learn (Alexander and Dugas, 1972) for elementary and the Lado English Series (Lado, 1971 Canadian edition) for secondary.

Data collected for the research include audio recordings of English classes, interviews, and the "picture card game", a communication game played with the students. It is this communication game which provided the principal data for the study presented here. In the discussion of the results, additional data from student compositions, a judgment of grammaticality task, informal interviews, and classroom speech will be referred to.

The picture card game is based on the "screen tasks" used in studies of cognitive development (e.g., Glucksberg, Krauss, Weisberg, 1965) and also in some oral proficiency tests for second language learners (Lipskur, 1971). Each subject played the game with one of the researchers who were all native speakers of English. The researcher had four picture cards, arrayed in front of her so that the student could not see them. The student then picked one card from a duplicate set and was told, "Tell me about your picture, and I'll try to guess which one you have." Seven sets of picture cards were used with each student. Comparison data from English native speakers in the same age range as the francophone subjects were also obtained. The game was found to work well with virtually all subjects. The weakest L₂ learners were able to play by simply listing items they saw in the picture:

Grade 5 francophone:

Student: Two house and two tree.

Investigator: What's the weather like?

Student: Summer.

Investigator: Summer?

Student: It's sunny.

* The pictures from one set of cards are included as an appendix. Richard Torkey drew the pictures used in the picture card game.

Grade 10 francophone:

Student: It's not a beautiful day. It's, uh, raining. There's a big gray cloud and a little house between two trees.

Grade 6 anglophone:

Student: There's a sun up in the sky. There's two houses and they both got red doors, red roofs, and black - and uh - black walls, two windows in the front. And there's a tree in the middle, between them. It's green.

Each of the francophone subjects played the communication game at least twice and two of the three groups played it three times. The schedule of the administrations for the three groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

School Grade and Month of Administration
of the Communication Game Task

	School Grade	Month
Group I (N = 36)	5	April/May
	7	December
	7	April/May
Group II (N = 36)	8	April/May
	9	April/May
	10	October
Group III (N = 27)	10	April/May
	11	April/May

Comparison data from anglophones were collected one time only from students in grades 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

In this paper I will report on the results from the 99 longitudinal subjects of the study. Results from the anglophone subjects will be referred to only in the discussion of these results. For more details of a direct comparison between anglophones and francophones on this task, see Lightboun, Moro, and Malcolin, 1981.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The focus of this study was the development of grammatical morphemes in the learners' speech. The grammatical morphemes chosen for analysis include the progressive -ing and five functions of -s morpheme. The morphemes and examples are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Grammatical Morphemes Investigated

Copula -s	She's happy.
Progressive auxiliary -s	He's blowing out the candles.
3rd singular -s	He takes a bath.
Plural -s	The girl wants some cookies.
Possessive -s	The boy's hat has stripes on it.
Progressive -ing	She's wearing a red skirt.

These morphemes were chosen for investigation for three reasons:

- (1) These grammatical morphemes are fairly frequent in spontaneous speech and it is possible to create situational or conversational contexts which lead naturally to the use of one or another of them. Furthermore, it is relatively easy to quantify results in terms of correct uses, omissions, and incorrect forms.
- (2) Preliminary observations of students in their ESL classes showed that the multiple functions of the -s morpheme in English caused learners some difficulty even in grade 11. All the morphemes had been taught - at least in an introductory lesson - to all subjects.
- (3) Investigating these forms permitted us to make comparisons with previous research by other researchers (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Krashen, 1977; Larsen-Freeman, 1975).

The grammatical morphemes were examined in terms of their use in obligatory contexts and percentage accuracy was determined for each group. In addition, notes were kept concerning the misuse or overuse of the morphemes. These incorrect occurrences were examined separately rather than being treated as part of the calculation of accuracy in obligatory contexts.

Results and discussion

The results of the analysis of the use of the six grammatical morphemes in obligatory contexts are shown in Figures 1-8.*

Figure 1 shows the combined results for all students for all administrations of the task. Figure 2 shows the results in a different way, aligning the grammatical morphemes vertically in order of their accuracy and comparing this to a summary of previous morpheme acquisition research adapted from Krashen (1977). In terms of rank orders, it may be argued that only the auxiliary is inconsistent with Krashen's order since his order makes no claims about the relative order of the -ing, plural, and copula. However, the differences between the two orders are in some cases greater than they may appear. For example, in our data, the auxiliary and plural, two morphemes which differ by only one rank, differ by 30% in terms of relative accuracy. Thus, the lower position of the plural is an important difference. The -ing, which ranks fourth and has an accuracy rate of only 5% in our data, is in the highest accuracy group in Krashen's order.

INSERT FIGURES 1 AND 2

Nevertheless, if the results are separated for nouns (plural, possessive) and verbs (-ing, copula, auxiliary, 3rd singular), it is

* These figures and some of the data appeared in Lightboun and Malcolin (1980).

This hypothesis was strongly supported by the results of the analysis of the grade 6 data. Grade 6 students added is or is (either correctly or incorrectly) to 89% of the pronouns and 78% of the singular nouns in clause-initial position.* Interestingly, is was always more frequent than s following nouns. Furthermore, noun + is was almost always a correctly formed copula or auxiliary construction. Noun + s, however, tended to be a case of s overuse or a memorized rote-time.

For the group as a whole, the overuse of s morphemes tended to decrease with increased proficiency, and the apparent lack of change in accuracy on the copula is deceptive because it shows neither the s overuse nor its decline. Furthermore, whereas most overused s markers were attached to the clause-initial noun phrase in the younger learners' speech, s overuse by the older, more advanced, learners was less predictable, less regular. Finally, whereas s overuse was fairly frequent in the speech of most of the younger learners, there was great variability among the older learners. Some of them had no examples of s overuse in their speech; for others, the s confusion remained a marked characteristic of their English. As noted above, a large part of their early accuracy on copula is due to the rote-learned "it's . . ." and "there's . . .".

It is difficult to determine the extent to which he's and she's should be considered unanalyzed "chunks". An examination of classroom data (Grade 6 class sessions) revealed that in grade 6, students heard and actually produced he and she more frequently than he's and she's in their English lessons. However, sentences containing the contracted forms were those that had been singled out for intensive practice and "habit formation" on the part of the learners, beginning in grade 6 and continuing through grade 5.

The relatively high accuracy on the auxiliary** for the Grade 6

* However, the grade 6 francophones actually used "there are . . ." in appropriate contexts much more frequently than the anglophones (Lightbown, Norris, and Malcolm, 1981). This singular-plural distinction had occupied a great deal of class time.

** It should be emphasized that "auxiliary" in our data refers only to the obligatory context for the progressive auxiliary with a third person singular subject where the verb is marked with -ing. That is, sentences such as "He taking . . ." or "The girl holding . . ." would be considered obligatory contexts for the auxiliary, but "He take . . ." would not.

apparent that only the -ing is "out of place", coming below rather than above the auxiliary. The explanation for this may lie in the patterns of classroom instruction and practice which these students have experienced (see discussion of Copula and Auxiliary results below).

Figures 3 - 8 display the results morpheme-by-morpheme. On each figure, for each group, each administration of the communication game is shown on a separate bar.

Copula and Auxiliary

The impression one gets from Figure 3 is that performance on is and is as copula and auxiliary was always quite high and that there was little change over time. This impression is correct when we limit our observation to students' accuracy in obligatory contexts

INSERT FIGURE 3

and if we look only at introducer forms such as "it's a . . ." or "there's a . . .". However, if we examine students' performance overall, it becomes evident that there are differences in the use of s morphemes among students at different levels. The differences lie largely in students' overuse or misuse of s forms.

Virtually all the students attached an incorrect s to words from time to time, for example, in utterances such as "it's look like a girl" or "She's take a cake" or "The girls (singular) try to take a cookie". Our earliest hypothesis about this overuse was that, due to the very high frequency of practice on copula and auxiliary structures in their ESL classes, students would have developed a habitual response of adding s to the clause-initial noun phrase.

students probably reflects habitual use of *he's* and *she's* combined with their tendency to use *and overuse -ing verb forms* (see discussion of *-ing* below). That is, because they used *-ing verbs* and *he's/she's* so frequently, it may have been more luck than design which led them to produce correct progressive constructions in contexts where they were required.

The situation for the older learners was somewhat different. Accuracy on the auxiliary was still high, but frequency was much lower for these students, the frequency of the *-ing* form was proportionally much lower relative to the use of unmarked verbs (e.g., *he take, she hold*) than for grade 6 students. Only the most proficient older learners used *-ing*, and when they used it, they tended to produce the full progressive accurately, with the correct auxiliary.

Possessive

The grammatical morpheme which was at the other extreme of the "correctness scale" from the copula and auxiliary was the possessive *-s* (see Figure 4). For this morpheme, there was some evidence of very slow improvement over time, but it seems unlikely that these ESL learners will ever use the possessive *-s* with a high degree of accuracy.

INSERT FIGURE 4

Poor performance on the possessive is characteristic of fluent bilinguals in Quebec and of ESL learners in every published study on the acquisition of grammatical morphemes.* In the case of these subjects, a number of factors contribute to the low accuracy, not the least of which may be its extremely low frequency of occurrence in the classroom. Except for the rare lessons where the form was taught explicitly, it was virtually absent from

* Unpublished studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that learners whose native language forms the plural in a way similar to English (e.g., Danish or German) have far less difficulty with this structure (Craig Chaudron, personal communication).

the speech of teachers or students over the entire period of the study. For example, in 15 lessons in one Grade 6 class, there were nearly 45,000 words produced by the teacher and students. Of these, 67 were possessive nouns. It should be noted however that the formation of the possessive had been taught in grades 4 and 5. Indeed there were several lessons in the text book which focused on it - including the very first.

Of course, there is no reason to assume that this aspect of language acquisition - or any other - is regular and linear. In fact, it is quite likely that accuracy on the possessive will never get much better for many, if not most, of the students. What is most striking about this is that, in terms of grammatical explanation and examples for practice, it appears that nothing could be simpler. The possessive is an excellent example of what Krashen, Robertson, Loon, and Rietman, (1977) would call a structure which is easy to "learn" but hard to "acquire". That is, one may be able to recite the rule for the possessive and perform well on a test and, moments later, fail to use it in spontaneous speech.

Progressive -ing

An exception to the trend of "no change" in accuracy on grammatical morphemes over time was in the *-ing* inflection. Unfortunately, the change started off in the wrong direction (see Figure 5). From Grade 6 to Grade 7, accuracy in supplying the *-ing*

INSERT FIGURE 5

In obligatory contexts for the progressive dropped from 69% to 39%. Students who had used the progressive forms correctly in Grade 6 did not do so in Grade 7.

Students in Grade 8 did no better. Accuracy on *-ing* rose above 50% at Grade 9, but dropped in Grade 10, approaching the Grade 6 level of accuracy again only in Grade 11.

Once again, percentage accuracy of a form in obligatory contexts does not tell the whole story. As noted in the discussion of the auxiliary, Grade 6 students not only used -ing more often than the older students in obligatory contexts for the progressive, they also used it more often in places where it didn't belong.* About half the verbs which Grade 6 students used in describing pictures in the picture card game were marked (correctly or incorrectly) with -ing. For students in Grade 8 and the weaker Grade 10 students, less than 20% of the verbs had the -ing added.

Relatively high accuracy and high frequency of use of the -ing form by the younger students appears to have been based on inadequate and incomplete knowledge of the progressive structure and even less knowledge of alternative structures. In Grades 5 and 6 the students had encountered a series of eleven lessons (each requiring several days to complete) on the progressive. They had repeated and practiced hundreds of sentences which focussed their attention on the structure. At the time when Grade 6 students played the picture card game, they had virtually never heard, in their English class, verbs with other inflections. The simple present was introduced in the very last lessons of the Grade 6 textbook; the past, not at all. However, the textbooks used at the secondary level (beginning in Grade 7) did not present the progressive form until the middle of Grade 8, after a number of other forms of the verb (simple present, past, future) had been presented. Thus the students in Grade 8 can be said to have heard English spoken without the progressive form for a period of almost two years.

In the teacher's classroom speech, for all classes, the most frequently heard form of verbs was the unmarked form - as an imperative (Take out your books), following medals (Today we will

* It should be noted that evidence for -ing overuse does not come from the picture card game data. In this situation the progressive was, in fact, the form which was most likely to be correct. Overuse of -ing was observed in other settings including an informal interview with students in which a question such as "What can the blond woman do?" was answered "She's jumping. She's running very fast."

read the exercises), or in simple present sentences with other than third person singular subjects (We need some paper). Virtually the only -ing verb which occurred regularly in classroom speech was the "going to" future (Now we're going to try something different). Even in this case, the "content" verb, which is probably more salient, is unmarked. (See Lightbown, in press, for further discussion of the teachers' speech.)

Thus here, as with the he's/she's forms discussed above, the students used, in the early stages of language learning, the forms which were intensively practiced and drilled. However, these rote-learned forms did not remain in the student's speech once the practice and drill on one form were replaced by practice on another form. The form adopted when rote-learned forms were dropped was most often the base form - the uninflected form - of the noun or verb.

Simple Present - Third Person Singular

As noted in the discussion of the progressive -ing above, the most appropriate form for describing the pictures used in the picture card game was usually the progressive. Thus there were relatively few obligatory contexts for the third person singular simple present. In fact there were only two verbs which occurred in the picture card game more than once or twice in contexts for the simple present. These verbs were want and have.* It is important to bear this in mind in interpreting the results shown in Figure 6. What appears to be a dramatic improvement in 3rd singular -s from Grade 6 to Grade 7 can be accounted for almost entirely by student's use of

INSERT FIGURE 6

* In reports on this research, accuracy on 3rd singular includes has. This does not conform to Bailey and Burt's (1974) scoring method which excludes does and has.

the verb have. Have never appears in the textbooks used in Grade 4, 5, and 6. Not surprisingly, it was extremely rare in the Grade 6 students' speech, being used only by students who had some exposure to English outside the classroom. When students learned the verb have in Grade 7, it became fairly frequent in their speech in the picture card game - sometimes in appropriate contexts (She has 3 balloons, she has a red skirt) and sometimes in not-so-appropriate contexts (He has 8 years). Many of the older secondary students used have in an introduction to their picture descriptions (It has a girl with 3 balloons). Across all groups of learners it is essentially accurate in using has in the simple present which is reflected in Figure 6.

In order to obtain more information about student's use of the 3rd singular, we added a second activity when we played the picture card game with each group for the second and third times. We called this the "Little Boy" task because it involved showing students cartoons of a little boy who, we said, "does the same thing every day". We asked the students explicitly then, "What does he do first?" and so on through five activities, thus attempting to create for each student at least five obligatory contexts for the 3rd singular -s. This task always followed the picture card game. Results from this task are shown in Figure 7 and probably reflect much more accurately students' ability to use this form with any verb other than have. Accuracy rose from the time the students first began to learn the form

INSERT FIGURE 7

in Grade 7, but a plateau appears to have been reached in Grade 10, and the results for Grade 11 were actually slightly worse.

The simple present third singular -s, like the possessive -s, is notoriously difficult to acquire. Unlike the possessive, however,

it cannot really be said to be easy to learn. Its form is easy enough, certainly, but its function in contrast to other verb forms is much less simple to describe. It is not surprising that our subjects should have such generally low performance on this morpheme. It is interesting, however, that, unlike the observed temporary high frequency of -ing, there does not appear to have been a period when these learners frequently marked verbs with -s because they happened to be studying this particular form. Verbs marked with -s always had much lower frequency than either uninflected or -ing inflected verbs. This may be due to one or a combination of several factors: (1) the third singular -s was never practiced in isolation as frequently or over as long a period as the sentence-initial -s forms or the -ing forms; (2) the third singular -s is not very salient, coming as it does in the middle of sentences and being non-syllabic; (3) in classroom speech where it was not being taught explicitly, obligatory contexts for the third singular -s were rare in the teachers' speech.

Plural

In grades 6 and 7, the subjects' accuracy on the plural was below 50% (see Figure 8). In grades 8, 9 and 10, students performed somewhat better, but their overall accuracy still fell below 65%.

INSERT FIGURE 8

The third group of students (grades 10 and 11) did little better. Thus, the general picture we get from plural accuracy figures is that there is relatively little improvement over the five years of English instruction. And yet, the plural appears to be another good example of what Krashen would call an "easy-to-learn" construction. It should not be a problem for a teacher to explain to students how the plural is formed. Indeed, for these francophone students, the basic "add an -s" rule for the plural corresponds to their own language when it is syllabic, that is, when the /aZ/ allomorph is required, as for "watches" or "pleases". Learners (L1 and L2) are even slower to acquire it, presumably because the uninflected word "sounds right" because the final consonant of the base form is a sibilant.

In its written form.

To test the possibility that students were aware that an -s usually marks the plural in English, even though they often failed to pronounce it, we compared the secondary students' accuracy on the plural in a judgement of grammaticality test and in a free composition with their accuracy in the oral language produced in the picture card game. The grammaticality judgement test was administered in the first year of the study. Students were instructed to find and correct errors in sentences presented in written form. Sentences containing unmarked plural nouns were included along with sentences containing other errors and sentences which were fully correct. Accuracy on the plural was no better than in the picture card game. For some groups it was even slightly worse (Lightbloom, Spada, and Wallace, 1980). These results suggest that for about half the plural items students read the sentences, found that they "sounded right" and left them as correct rather than applying the "easy rule" for the plural which they had been taught and which, in the written language, corresponds to their native language rule.

The compositions which were analyzed were written by the students at the end of the second year of the study. Students saw a short film and were asked to write the story of the film as if they were telling it to someone who had not seen it. The results of the analysis of the compositions showed that, while the students' accuracy was better by about 10% in the written language than in the oral data, they still failed to mark almost 30% of the plural nouns. It is interesting to note that, on French compositions written by the same students several months later, failure to mark the plural occurred in 9% of the obligatory contexts. The fact that the plural -s is not pronounced in French is probably an important factor interfering with its being produced in oral and written English and even occasionally in written French.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study of the use of grammatical morphemes by young French speakers receiving formal ESL instruction reveal what appears to be a discouraging lack of progress in the second language. For many students, there was a tendency to drop grammatical markers (specifically -s and -ing) that had previously been used, apparently correctly, in favour of unmarked forms of pronouns, nouns, and verbs. This appears to be related to the kind of ESL instruction they were exposed to. Students were required to do intensive practice on one structure at a time, one after the other. One structure was drilled for days at a time, then discarded, as a new one was introduced.

In contrast, L2 learners acquiring the language in a "natural setting" appear to begin by using mostly uninflected forms (as do child L1 learners). Except for some frequently heard routines, (e.g., what's your name?), learners add grammatical morphemes gradually as they discover the need for them to make their meaning clear. Insistence on letter-perfect (or morpheme-perfect) performance in the earliest stages of language acquisition may have the disadvantage of discouraging and frustrating learners without the assumed advantage of creating "good habits" from the beginning. The time spent in drilling students toward "good habits" may be taking time away from activities which are more fruitful for language acquisition. At a minimum, more varied and challenging activities may serve to maintain some motivation.

These results also imply that, in Grade 6, the frequency of certain verb forms in the students' speech was determined more by what was frequently practiced than by the overall frequency of the forms in the teachers' speech. But in the long term, there may be a closer relationship between the teacher's speech and the student's L2 acquisition. That is, it may be that, at first, what is taught - what is practiced

intensively (such as the -ing in Grade 6) - may predict what students use in their attempts at spontaneous communication. Eventually, however, early intensive practice may be less important than other factors such as which language features are heard frequently, the contexts in which they occur, how easily they are processed, what they can be compared to in the native language and the target language, and how important they are for communication. It may even be that the intensive practice on certain forms actually interferes with the acquisition of English.

This paper is not meant to be another in a series of studies supporting the "natural order" hypothesis for morpheme acquisition in any strict sense of a specific order of acquisition of six grammatical morphemes or even groups of morphemes (Krashen, 1977; Dulay & Burt, 1980). Indeed, it seems likely that certain predictions of the "natural order" hypothesis (especially the early acquisition of the plural) would not hold for French-speakers, even if they were learning English outside the classroom.

On the other hand, these results do not disconfirm the "natural sequence" hypothesis. The fact that these learners' accuracy orders differ from those observed in previous studies need not be attributed to the fact that they are native speakers of French. The differences may be due to (1) the kind of exposure they had to a distorted version of the English language, and (2) the fact that they were required to repeat and practice sentences containing grammatical complexity far beyond what they would have included in their speech if they had been acquiring English through communicative interaction involving more varied natural language.

What is more striking in the results, given the teachers' zeal in correcting errors in precisely these forms, is that there was relatively little improvement over time in the accuracy of learners' use of the grammatical morphemes investigated in this study.

Furthermore, with the exception of -ing, there was no change in the relative accuracy of these morphemes. The changes which did occur in the learners' English, tended not to take place so much in the area of grammatical accuracy as in fluency and vocabulary. One must wonder what the results would have been if the English language they had encountered in the classroom had been richer, more interesting, more challenging from the point of view of content.

It would be inappropriate to claim that the research demonstrates the validity of an alternative to the structuralist discrete-point approach to L₂ instruction used in these students' ESL classes. The research needed to confirm the superiority of other approaches can only be done in large scale studies comparing the effectiveness of these other approaches (called "communicative" or "notional-functional"). The accuracy and validity of such research is always very difficult to establish because classroom practice so often differs from what teachers say they are doing or which "method" they are trying to follow.

What this research does show is that, given 20 or 30, or even 50 minutes per day in which to teach English to groups of adolescents who do not use the language outside of school, practicing the same grammatical points, month after month, year after year, does not lead to the improvement one might expect in those aspects of language which are emphasized in the instruction.

The goal of grammatical accuracy in the speech of learners whose total exposure to the language is, at best, less than 175 hours per year is clearly unrealistic. What is worse, however, is that the interests and abilities of the young learners are often ignored or frustrated. For example, the constant re-use of a very limited vocabulary, for purposes of practicing grammatical structures whose functions the learners do not really understand, leaves them with the impression that they are doing the same thing over and over again. The teachers in the classes we observed were conscientious, making every effort to teach English in the way they

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had been trained to teach or in the way dictated by the textbook. They allowed little free expression, controlling students' responses so that relatively few errors occurred in classroom speech. Students thus tended to hear English which was grammatically correct. Nevertheless, when they did attempt to use English in the picture card game to communicate information, their use of English often showed patterns of simplification and generalization (and therefore error) which are characteristic of the speech of learners who acquire their second language outside the classroom.

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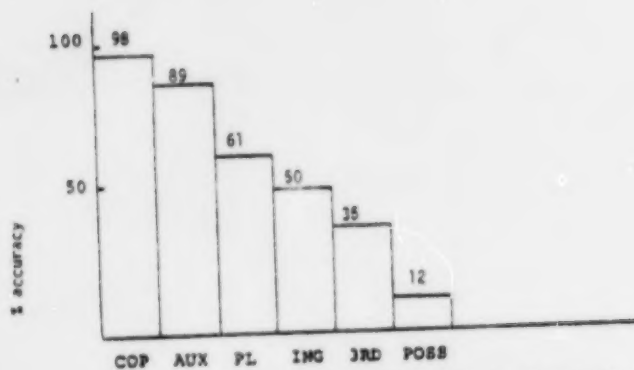


Figure 1. Accuracy in obligatory contexts of grammatical morphemes under investigation for all subjects, all administrations, N = 260.

Krashen 1977



Lightbown

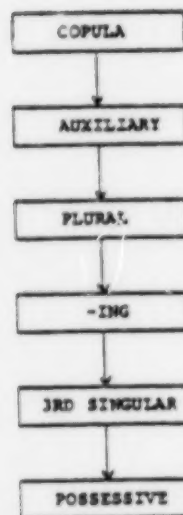


Figure 2. Adaptation of Krashen's (1977) "Proposed 'Natural Order' for Second Language Acquisition" compared with accuracy order observed in this study. In Krashen's order, morphemes in the same box are not considered to have a fixed order relative to each other.

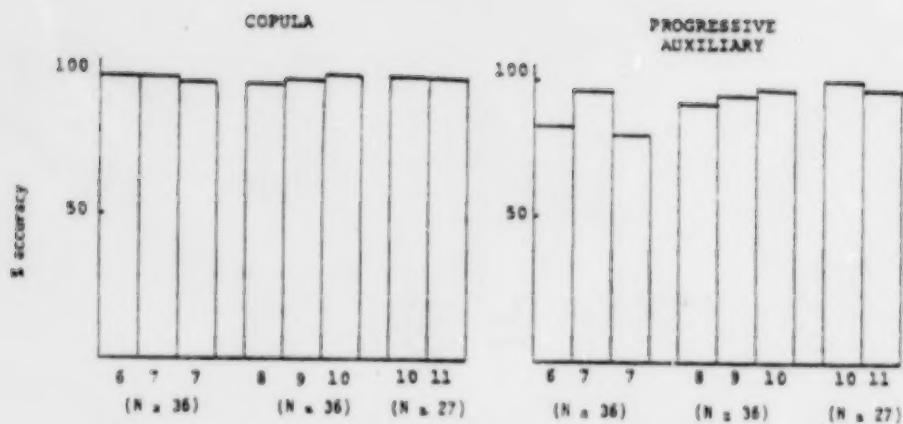


Figure 3. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for copula and progressive auxiliary.

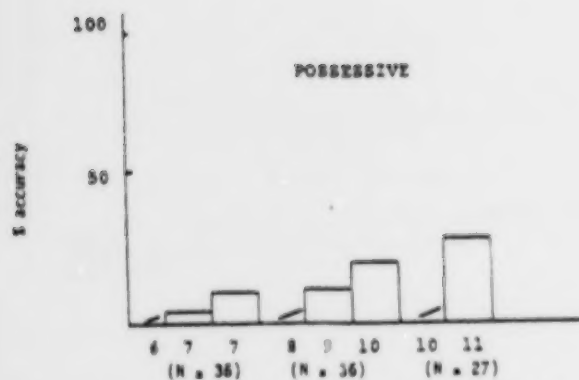


Figure 4. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for possessive.

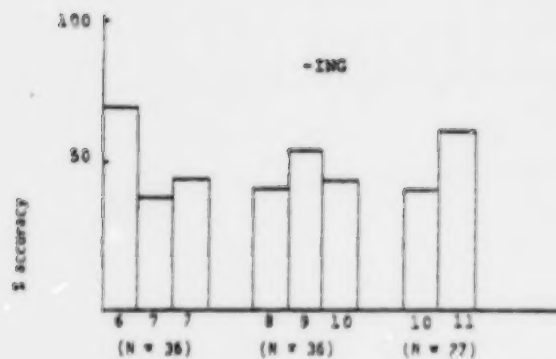


Figure 5. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for -ing.

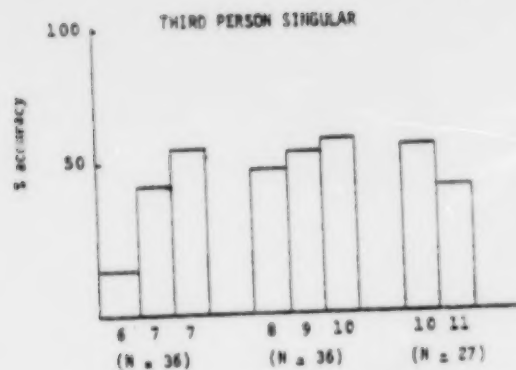


Figure 6. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for simple present third singular verb forms. Picture Card Game.

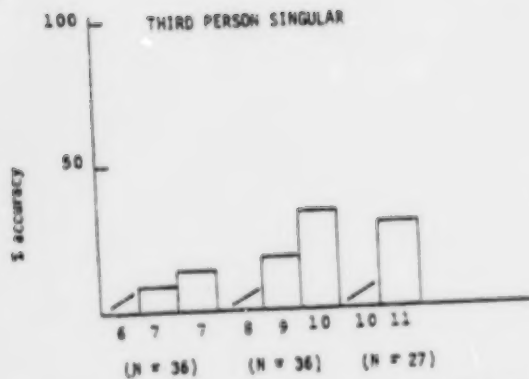


Figure 7. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for simple present for third person singular: "Little boy" task.

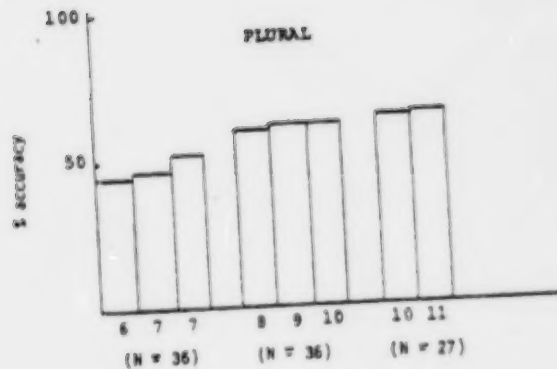


Figure 8. Accuracy in obligatory contexts for plural.